



Canadian
Heritage

Patrimoine
canadien

Canada

News Release ~ Communiqué

Making headway on proposed national park

OTTAWA, April 19, 1995 - Canadian Heritage Minister Michel Dupuy and Kivalliq Inuit Association President Paul Kaludjak today announced that discussions are underway between Parks Canada and Keewatin Inuit concerning a proposed national park at Wager Bay on the north-western coast of Hudson Bay.

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, completed in 1993, commits both the federal government and Inuit to work together to establish new national parks in Nunavut. The proposed 26, 500 sq km national park at Wager Bay is an excellent representative of the Central Tundra Natural Region and would make an important contribution to Canada's system of national parks which strives to represent each of Canada's 39 natural regions.

"I personally welcome the decision of the Kivalliq Inuit Association to join with Parks Canada in consulting Keewatin Inuit about this long-standing park proposal," said Mr. Dupuy. "I look forward to learning the results of the consultations."

As part of the community consultation process now underway, residents of Repulse Bay, the community with the closest traditional ties to the Wager Bay area, as well as residents of Rankin Inlet, Coral Harbour, Baker Lake and Chesterfield Inlet will be consulted. Other Canadians will also be invited to contribute their ideas on the park proposal.

The park proposal was first suggested as a national park in 1978. Consultations on the Wager Bay proposal were suspended in 1980 at the request of Inuit of the Keewatin who wanted land claim issues resolved before the question of a park was addressed.

If consultations determine that a national park is desirable at Wager Bay, then an Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement, as required by the land claim agreement, would be negotiated as the next step of the park establishment process. It would address such park establishment and management issues as Inuit training, employment, business opportunities and park access.

"Solid progress is also being made by the federal government on other park proposals in the Northwest Territories," added Mr. Dupuy.

The land withdrawal in the western Arctic for the proposed Tuktut Nogait National Park, which was recently agreed to as a means of protecting the park lands pending completion of park establishment negotiations, has now been legally formalized. In addition, Parks Canada and the Inuit of the eastern Arctic have entered into negotiations to conclude Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreements to create North Baffin National Park and to establish Auyuittuq and Ellesmere Island National Park reserves as national parks, as required by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

Further information:

Bruce Amos
Canadian Heritage
(819) 997-4908

Tongola Sandy
Kivalliq Inuit Association
(819) 645-2810

BACKGROUNDER

Proposed Wager Bay National Park

Located on the western coast of Hudson Bay, Wager Bay is an inland sea, extending 100 km westward into the remote barrens of the Keewatin District of the Northwest Territories. Parks Canada has long had an interest in establishing a national park to protect this natural area of Canadian significance to represent the Central Tundra Natural Region in the national park system.

The proposed park area is a rift valley and includes an impressive variety of landforms including eskers and other glacial features. Lowlands and river valleys which support delicate Arctic wildflowers, hardy lichens and sedges contrast with areas of rock desert and rubble-strewn uplands. Wildlife typical of the Central Tundra thrive in this remote environment. Caribou, wolf, muskoxen, Arctic hare and Arctic ground squirrel are some of the species found within the proposed park. Cliffs and eroded river valleys provide critical habitat for Peregrine and gyrfalcon.

Coastal features and processes are characteristic of this natural region and the proposed park includes a major marine element. Wager Bay has 8 metre tides and strong tidal action which produce an unusual reversing falls where Wager Bay meets Ford Lake. This area, as well as the mouth of Wager Bay, remain open during winter months. These areas of open water, known as polynias, contribute to the year-round richness of marine mammal life, including polar bear, beluga, ringed and bearded seal and occasionally walrus and narwhal. Tidal flats and river mouths provide important staging areas for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl.

Equally important are cultural resources, evidence of centuries of human use of the proposed park area. Over 500 archaeological sites have been found, including features such as Inukshuks, ("stone men") caches, fox traps and tent rings. An abandoned Hudson's Bay Company post also adds to the human story of the Wager Bay area. Keewatin Inuit continue to travel to the area as part of their traditional lifestyle.

Opportunities for visitors within the proposed park include nature viewing, natural and cultural history interpretation, photography, hiking, boat touring and sea kayaking. An existing Inuit-owned naturalists' lodge offers visitor accommodation and provides guide services. Park visitors would also be able to learn about the people of the North, their culture and the history of northern exploration.

Further information:

Elizabeth Seale
Canadian Heritage
(403) 920-6700
